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A

SERMON

Preached on the Day of the

Public Fast,

April the 11th. 1679.

AT

St. *Margarets Westminster*;

BEFORE THE

Honourable House of Commons.

BY

JOHN SHARP, Rector of St. *Giles* in the Fields, and Chaplain to the Right Honourable *Heneage* Lord *Finch*, Lord High Chancellor of *England*.

Published by Order of the House.

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Published by Order of the House.

A SERMON ON

Revel. ii. 5.

—I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy Candleſtick out of his place, except thou repent.

WE are this day met together to humble ourſelves for our ſins before God, and to implore his mercy to this Nation, in the Preſerving our *King*, our *Laws*, our *Religion* and our *Lives*, and in Bleſſing the preſent Publick Counſels in order thereunto.

And never was a work of this nature more ſeaſonable or more neceſſary than at this time, and to us of this Kingdom: For as our *ſins* were never greater, never cried louder to Heaven for Vengeance, ſo the *Judgments* they deſerve did never more viſibly threaten us than they do at

this Day. Inſomuch that if our circumſtances be duly conſidered, we may have juſt reaſon to apprehend, that our Saviour in the *way* of his *Providence* does now ſpeak to the *People* and *Church* of *England* the ſame words, that he ordered St. *John* by the *way* of *Letter* to ſpeak to the *Church* of *Epheſus*. *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the firſt works, or elſe I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy Candleſtick out of his place, except thou repent.*

This Church of *Epheſus*, as alſo the other ſix Churches of *Aſia*, to each of which St. *John* by the command of our Saviour doth here addreſs a ſeveral Epiſtle, were at the time when theſe Letters were dictated very flouriſhing Churches, favoured as much with the eſpecial preſence and influence of Chriſt, as ever any Churches were.

This appears from the Preface to this Epiſtle in the firſt Verſe of this Chapter, wherein Chriſt the Author of the Epiſtle is deſcribed, as *holding the ſeven Stars in his right hand, and walking in the midſt of the ſeven Golden Candleſticks.*

Cap. i. 20. The *ſeven Stars* are the *Angels* of the *ſeven Churches* as he himſelf Interprets them, that is, according to the ſence of all Antiquity, The *Biſhops* the *Preſidents*, the *Governours* of thoſe Churches. His *holding them in his hand*, is his ſupporting and directing them for the good of the people.

people. The *ſeven Golden Candleſticks* in the midſt of which he walked, are, as he himſelf likewiſe expounds them, the *ſeven Churches* themſelves, as being the places where thoſe *Stars*, thoſe *Lights* did ſhine. And his *walking among thoſe Candleſticks* is his preſence in thoſe Churches, Encouraging or Reproving, Rewarding or Puniſhing the members of them as there was cauſe, having the power in his hands, either to continue thoſe Lights among them, or to remove them to another place. Ibid.

I inſiſt on the Explication of this paſſage, becauſe it lets us *in to* the meaning of the phraſe that we meet with in the Text of *removing the Candleſtick out of its place*, which from hence we plainly ſee to be the *Un-Churching* any people, the withdrawing the Light of the Goſpel from them.

Well, But this Church of *Epheſus* to which the Epiſtle I am now concerned in was written, how much ſoever Chriſt had done for them, had it ſeems made but a bad requital of his kindneſſes. Cap. ii. 2, 3. At firſt indeed they had walked very worthily, and are much commended by our Saviour, for their *Zeal* and *Piety* and *Labour* in *Religion*, but now they were fallen to a great degree of negligence and remiſſneſs.

It is true they at this time continued Orthodox in their *Doctrines* and *Opinions*, they did both

know and profess the true Religion, and were Zealous against false Doctrines, which also our Saviour takes notice of and commends them for,

V. 6. *This*, saith he, *thou hast, That thou hatest the deeds of the* Nicolaitans *which I also hate*, but yet notwithstanding, so offended was he with the *Loss of their first Love*, the decay of *Devotion* and *Charity* among them, that he threatens them solemnly in the Text, *That if they did not repent, and do the first works, he would remove their Candlestick out of its place*, that is, as I said, he would withdraw from them his *presence* and the *Light* of his *Gospel*.

This is a brief account of my Text as to the first design and litteral meaning of it, that is, as it concerns the Church of *Ephesus*. I now desire leave to make such Application of it to ourselves as may be subservient to the ends designed in the Solemnity of this Day.

And we have warrant enough to make such an *Application*; for let us not flatter ourselves, what is here *Reproved*, and what is here *Threatened*, hath not such a peculiar respect to the particular Church of *Ephesus*, but that it doth equally concern all Churches so far as they fall under the same Character. Which whether we at this day day do or no, it is fit we should seriously examine ourselves about.

Here are three things considerable in the Text.

First,

First, a great *Sin*, and *Guilt*, supposed. *Secondly*, a great *Judgment* denounced for that *Guilt*, no less than the *Un-Churching* of that people that had contracted it. *Thirdly*, the means prescribed for the averting that Judgment, *viz. Repentance.*

My Application of the Text shall proceed upon the same Heads, that is,

I shall *first* desire leave to enquire, whether we of this Nation, at this day, for our manifold *sins* and *guilt*, may not be judged to be in as bad or worse circumstances than the Church of *Ephesus* in the Text, and consequently have not just reason to fear the same *Judgment* that they are here threatned with.

Secondly, I shall consider the *Judgment* here threatened, how grievous a one it is, and consequently how great an argument the consideration of it ought to be to us all to *Repent.*

Thirdly, I shall speak somthing of this *Repentance* how it ought to be expresst, if we would thereby prevent the *Judgment.*

I begin with the first of these points, which concerns our *sin* and our *guilt*, to make some representation of the *Spiritual Maladies* and Diseases that this Nation groans under, those *publick grievances* by which the Holy Spirit of God is provoked to withdraw himself from us, and to give us up to the Power and Dominion of other Masters. This

This I muſt confeſs, is a very melancholy and unpleaſing Argument, but yet very neceſſary to be inſiſted on, and that very freely too: eſpecially upon ſuch an occaſion as this; and moſt of all, when I ſpeak to thoſe whoſe Concernment, and whoſe Care it is to inſpect theſe Matters, and from whom we hope for a Cure of our Diſtempers.

It is here taken notice of the Church of *Epheſus* to her commendation, that ſhe retained the truth *of the Chriſtian Doctrine* in oppoſition to the *Hereſies* of thoſe times, and this, God be thanked, may be ſpoke of us at this day, we are not much degenerated from the purity of Chriſtianity as to Doctrinals. Our Church may vie with all the Churches in the world, for Orthodoxy and Conformity to the Primitive Church in matters of Faith.

And, bleſſed be Gods Name, this Light is not put under a Buſhel. There is perhaps no Church ſince the Apoſtles time wherein the *Divine-Truth* hath been more publickly and more purely taught, or the *Sacraments* more rightly and duely Adminiſtred than among us, and no Church wherein *Knowledg* has more abounded among all the members of it than it does now in Ours.

But the thing that is charged upon the Church of *Epheſus*, is their corrnption in Manners, and this is the point we are now concerned in, and which

which tis fit the whole Nation should examine themselves upon, and deeply lay to heart.

Though we still keep up the *form* of *Godliness*, yet have we not in a great measure lost the *power* thereof? Though the Principles which our Church *Owneth* and *Professeth* be excellently good; Yet do not many of us horribly contradict them in our *Practices*? Is there not a visible decay of Christian Piety to be observed among us, and a Deluge of Vice and Wickedness of all sorts overspreading the face of the Land?

I speak not here of the faults of this or the other particular person, for we know there was never any Age nor any Religion that was free from such, but I speak of the National sins, the reigning Vices of the Times, the miscarriages that are so prevailing and so common that a publick guilt is contracted by them, and the whole people may justly share in the punishment of them.

I must confess, to speak strictly, the Degrees and Proportions in which any Age grows better or worse than those that went before it, are not easily to be measured, unless we could live the space of several Ages, and out of our own experience make observations and remarks upon them. All that we have to make our estimate by, is the Histories and Records that are left us of the state of former Ages with which we may com-

compare our own; But yet this way is often very fallacious, becauſe it is the common humour and cuſtom of men, even of thoſe that tranſmit the Memoires of their own Times to Poſterity, ſtill to complain of their own Times moſt, and to prefer the former Ages before that in which they live.

Upon this conſideration I ſhall not be forward to draw a compariſon between the former times and ours in order to the ſhewing how much greater our *ſins* are than of thoſe that went before us, and conſequently how much riper we are now for *Judgment*.

Moſt certain it is, That God, as he has done to the Sea, ſo has he to every Nation, *ſet its bounds* of wickedneſs *beyond which they ſhall not paſs*; and when their iniquities are at full he will not fail to repay vengeance into their Boſom. The *Canaanites*, the *Jews*, and many other Nations I might name have been ſad inſtances of this kind of proceeding.

But when a Nation is come to that Fatal Period none knows but God, and whether we are not already very near it we cannot tell, but we ought infinitely to fear.

Too evident it is, that things are in a very bad poſture among us, and our ſins are grown to that height, that it is a Miracle of the Divine patience and long-ſuffering that we are not

not already consumed. Let us be more particular.

If the prevailing of *Atheism* in a Land, and the contempt of God and Religion:

If open *Lewdness* and *Debauchery*, and *Immorality* of all kinds:

If the turning *Religion* into a mere piece of *Formality*, and *outward profession*:

If *Schisms* and *Divisions* and *Factions* in a Church:

And lastly, if our general *Unthankfulness* for and *Unprofitableness* under the means of Grace, and the many mercies and privileges that have been vouchsafed us.

If any or all of these sins can provoke God to forsake a Nation and give it up to ruin (and yet these sins are both in the Scripture, and by the ordinary course of Gods providence especially markt out for such) then are we of this Nation at this time in a very deplorable condition, and are to expect Judgment without Mercy, unless it be prevented by a speedy Reformation.

For *first* of all, was there ever more *Atheism* and *Irreligion* in a *Christian* Nation, at least in a *Protestant Christian* Nation; or more countenance given to such *Doctrines* and *Opinions* as directly tend thereto than now among us!

There are not many perhaps that dare in expreſs terms affirm *That there is no God*, becauſe they know it is not ſafe ſo to do: But many affirm it by conſequence, by aſſerting ſuch Principles from whence it muſt neceſſarily be concluded.

For what is the conſequence of ſuch Doctrines as theſe; That there is nothing but *Body* in the world, and that the very Notion of a *Spiritual Incorporeal* Being implies a contradiction; That there is nothing *Juſt* or *Unjuſt*, *Virtuous* or *Vitious* in itſelf, but as it is made ſo by the Laws of the Kingdom. That all things come to paſs by a *Fatal Neceſſity*, and that no man is ſo *free* an *Agent* as to be capable of Rewards and Puniſhments for his Actions: What is the reſult of theſe Doctrines, but the neceſſary introducing of *Atheiſm* and the baniſhing *Religion* from among men? It being upon theſe Principles, not only a needleſs impertinent, but an abſurd contradictious thing.

And yet are not theſe the avowed Principles of too many among us, and thoſe too that are the great pretenders to *Reaſon* and *Philoſophy*?

But what has been the effect of ſuch *Philoſophy*? Why ſuitable enough to the Notions of it. You may meet with thoſe that make no ſcruple to ſcoff at God and every thing that relates to the other world, and to turn into *Ridicule* every thing

that

that is Sacred. And he is accounted the *Great Spirit* that *thinks* freely, and dares *speak* boldly what he *thinks*. And if a man will set up for a *Wit* he cannot take a more effectual course to gain him that Reputation in many Companies, than to be confident and peremptory in contradicting the common Sentiments of men as to *Religion*, To be able to *Burlesque* the Scriptures humorously, To be dexterous in imploying Religious Phrases to Scurrilous Purposes, and to Baffle and Droll out of countenance those that stand up for the Reputation of Sacred things.

As the world goes, it is a piece of *virtue* to believe a God and Providence, and future Rewards and Punishments, with the other Principles of Natural Religion; They do very well that go thus far. But as for *Instituted Revealed* Religion, for instance *Christianity*, How many are there that think themselves no way concerned in it, but hold it in the same rank with *Judaism* and *Mahometanism*? And if they profess *that* rather than either of *these*, it is only because they were born and bred up in it; It is the *Religion* of the *Country* where they live; but if either of the other should be set up in the place of it, they would as willingly conform to that.

One would think that such men as these should not be found in a *Country* that calls itself *Christian*, much less in a *Christian Country* that calls itself *Re-*

formed; And yet such is the *infelicity* and the *fault* of ours, that men of these Principles and Practices do abound among us. O Blessed God! Whither shall we come at last if timely care be not taken of these things?

But *Secondly*, If to the *Atheism* and *Infidelity* that reigns among us we add the open *Prophaneness* and *Debauchery* that is every where to be observed in our days, how much blacker will our guilt appear?

Where is that Antient *Seriousness* and *Reservedness* and *Modesty* that heretofore has been thought not only essential to the *Spirit* of a *Christian*, but *Natural* to the *Temper* of an *Englishman*?

Alas! We seem to have changed not only our *Religion* but our *Climate* too. And may for Dissoluteness and Luxury, for Pride and Vanity and Idleness compare with the antient *Asiaticks*, and do perhaps out-strip several of our present neighbour Nations, though of a worse Religion.

But this is not all, so much are we degenerated from the antient strictness of Christianity, That those things that would not have been named among the first Christians without horror and banishing out of their Society all those that did them, are frequently practised among us. And those Vices that even in the worse times of Christianity the Actors were affraid or ashamed to own,

own, are now made a matter of Sport and Merriment, a *Trick* of *Youth*, a *Humour*, or a *Frolick*. What was then a deed of darkness, is now too often done in the face of the Sun, and the persons concerned in the wickedness are so far from blushing at their guilt, that they relate their own actions as a pleasant entertainment for their Company.

O the Riots and Drunkenness; the Frauds and Cousenage; the Filthy and Lewd speeches; the Whoredoms and Adulteries; the Blasphemous Oaths and Imprecations that are dayly without any regret, any sense of shame, practised among us.

We seem to have lost not only the virtue of *Modesty* but of *Hypocrisie* too (if so *bad* a thing may be called by so *good* a name.) Those Vices and Lewdnesses which heretofore sought corners and wore a Mask do now appear with a naked Face.

It is true, It is to be hoped, That the greatest part of us are not guilty of such Crimes and Immoralities as we speak of: But this does not wholly excuse us; For we are all faulty in this, That these kind of Vices are not sufficiently branded and put out of countenance. They pass under *easie*, not to say, *Creditable* names. And so little a sense have we of them that a man may keep his Reputation among us though he be never

never ſo Vicious, ſuppoſing that his Vices be of the Mode of the Country. This very thing without our perſonal guilt makes the *ſin* a *National ſin*; and God will Viſit theſe things upon us, except we Repent.

But to make up the meaſure of our Iniquities, we can in the *Third* place live after this diſſolute rate, and yet at the ſame time many of us think ourſelves *Religious*: we increaſe the guilt of our *Prophaneneſs* by joyning *Formality* with it.

If we would diſclaim all Religion when we led ſuch wretchedly careleſs and ſenſual lives, it would in ſome reſpects be more tolerable: For then Chriſtianity would not ſuffer by us, It would get no *Odium*, no Ignominy in the world, It would not be an occaſion to men to turn Atheiſts:

But to live *Un-Chriſtian* lives and yet to call ourſelves *Chriſtians*: Nay to make our *Religion* a Sanctuary for our *Vices*, and to think that we may the more freely Indulge ourſelves in them becauſe we are of the Right Religion; This is intolerable, and extremely aggravates the iniquity of our practices. And yet this is a fault that we of this Nation are notoriouſly guilty of.

We often make Religion to conſiſt in Opinion and outward Profeſſion. If we have but once joined

joined ourselves to that party of Christians which we think is the Right and do Espouse all their *Controversies* and are Zealous in the observance of their particular *Forms* and *Rites*, whereby they are distinguished from the other *Sects* that are in being among us, we think we are true *Saints*, let our *Morals* be what they will.

This is the *Religion* that is every where too much in Fashion. If for instance I have Listed my self a Member of some *Church* of the *Separation*, (as there is great variety of them) If I be but true to the Principles of my *Church*, and vigorous in opposing those that are not of my Way; and constant in my attendance upon the *Brethren* at their *Assemblies*: This Zeal of mine will excuse a multitude of my other Failings: And though I now and then use indirect ways of Dealing in my Calling; Though I be Uncharitable and Censorious; Though I affront Authority and live in a constant Disobedience and Contempt of the Laws of it, yet my fervour for that which I take to be the *True Religion* and the Relation I stand in to the *people* of *God* will bear me out as to these matters.

On the other side, If I be a Member of the *Church* of *England*, I am too often apt to think my self in a fair way to Heaven, if I be but *Stout* for the *Church*, and *Zealous* against the *Sectaries*, and punctual in observing the *Ceremonies* of the *Liturgy*,

Liturgy, and now and then come to the *Sacrament*; Though it may be I have nothing of the True *Life* and *Spirit* of Chriſtianity in me, nothing of that Sobriety and Meekneſs, and Charity, and inward Devotion that our Saviour doth indiſpenſably require of all his followers.

Nay ſo far from that it may be I think 'tis no matter how I live, if I be but a good *Subject* to the *King* and a true *Son* of the *Church*. Nay it is well if don't go further, it is well if I don't make *Vice* and *Debauchery* an eſſential Character of a man that is right in his Principles; it is well if I don't brand ſerioufneſs of Converſation, and a care of ones words and actions with the name of *Fanaticiſm*, and reproach every one as a *Puritan*, that will not Swear and Drink and take thoſe Un-Chriſtian Liberties that I do.

You know there are ſuch men as theſe frequently to be found in all the ſeveral *Sects* and *Ways* of *Religion* among us. But O! What is become of Chriſtianity all the while.

This ſure cannot be thy Religion, O Bleſſed Jeſus! ſince it is ſo unlike both thy Actions and thy Doctrines: Thou never placedſt any virtue or praiſe in *Knowing* but in *Doing*; In being of this or the other particular external *Mode* of *Religion*: but in *believing* thy *Goſpel* and *following* thy *Example*, in Mortifying our Luſts, and leading a life of Peaceableneſs, and Obedience, and Humility,

lity, and all manner of inward Holineſs and Purity.

How our Brethren of the *Separation* will diſpoſe of their Members that are of this temper, I know not; But as to all thoſe that pretend to be of our Communion, and yet live ſcandalous lives, and think that their owning themſelves for the *Sons* of the *Church* will make Atonement for their Immoralities, It is to be feared they have done us more hurt than ever they will do us good. And unleſs they would Reform, it may perhaps be wiſhed that we were rid of them: Let them declare themſelves *Fanaticks*, *Papiſts*, Any thing, rather than Members of the *Church* of *England*.

And though by their Receſſion and going over to the Enemies Camp we might poſſibly be ſo weakened that we could not ſupport ourſelves, but muſt be forced to fall under our Adverſaries; Yet I do not know whether even then the Church would not be the better for it. And, it would perhaps be more deſireable to live in a mean, low, afflicted condition without ſuch Company, than to govern the world with it.

But *Fourthly*, Theſe are not all the Maladies which this diſtreſſed *Church* and *Nation* labours under: There is another Wound that is as

Wide and Bleeds as much as any of the rest: And which, if timely care be not taken of it, may cause her expiration as soon as any other.

I mean the Unnatural, Un-Christian *Feuds* and *Divisions* that are amongst us, our Nations being rent and torn into so many *Parties* and *Factions*, and the cruel and bitter *Animosities* with which each party does prosecute the other. And all this, if men would consider, for Little things in comparison; things certainly not worth all this heat, things that the Wisest and Best of the several dissenting parties confess to be indifferent.

O! How do men by these foolish and unaccountable Divisions weaken the common interest that all pretend at least to be concerned for? What advantages are hereby given to the Adversaries?

It is likely indeed that as They first set on foot, so They still continue to foment these differences. They laugh at this opportunity of making Proselytes to their Religion; and a plentiful Harvest they have hereby Reaped to themselves.

But where is our wisdom in the mean time? Have men no more understanding than to be still hot and eager in their contentions about a shadow, when there is an Enemy at the Gate, that is in a fair way to take from us the *Substance*?

Some

Some indeed may be apt to diſpute which ſide ought to comply, Whether the *Diſſenters* ought to come over to the *Eſtabliſhed Church*, or the *Church* to them? It is not now a time fully to debate the Merits of that Cauſe. But this may be truly ſaid, If men would be honeſt and ſincere, and mix no paſſion or worldly concernment with their Religion, the Point would ſoon be Decided on the Churches ſide.

Every man that calls himſelf a *Proteſtant* would think himſelf obliged to obey Lawful Authority in all things where he was convinced their commands were not Unlawful. And if he could not with a ſafe Conſcience come up to it in *all things*, he would come up as far as he could. And as for thoſe things that he was not ſatisfied about, as he would not Condemn or Cenſure Thoſe that were perſuaded, or practiſed otherwiſe, ſo neither would he raiſe any diſturbance in the Church by joyning himſelf to an oppoſite Party.

And on the other ſide Thoſe that did Conform to the Church in *all things* would not withdraw their Charity from their fellow Chriſtians for not doing ſo much as They. Though they differed from them in ſeveral Opinions, yet they would joyn hands with them in all Chriſtian Offices of Mutual *Love* and *Charity*, and in a joynt oppoſition of the *Common Enemy*.

But alas! Things are not thus with us. And I note it as a fault for which we ought deeply to be affected this Day; And if men did duely weigh the *sinfulness* and the *danger* that all *Schisms* and *Separations* of this kind do bring upon a Nation, they would be thus affected.

If human conjectures about the Reasons and Causes of Divine Judgments may be allowed, it will appear from History and Experience that there has been as much War and blood-shed caused in the world; as many Nations desolated, as many Churches Ruined, by the malignity and evil influence of this *Sin* of *Schism* as any other.

And if ever God in judgment shall think fit to give over this flourishing *Church* of ours as a prey to that mighty *Hunter*, that would erect an Universal *Spiritual Monarchy* to himself upon the Ruines of all the particular *Churches* of *Christendom*, we should have good Reason to believe that the unnecessary *Divisions* and *Quarrels* among ourselves had a great hand in bringing on the *Judgment*.

In all appearance we of this Nation might be Impregnable, as to our *Religion*, if those Protestants amongst us, who have been so long separated from the Communion of our National Church would once return into its bosom; that we might all heartily join together in *Loving* and

Assisting

Assisting one another, and *Opposing* the publick *Adversary*.

But *Fifthly* and *Lastly*, If the state of our *Church* and *Nation* was not near so bad as I have now represented it, Yet there is another thing still that *all*, even the *best* of us, have reason to be sensible of and to mourn for; as that which of it self is sufficient to bring destruction upon us. And that is our *Ingratitude* to God for his many *Mercies* and *Deliverances*, and our *Unprofitableness* under those *means* of *Grace* that he has been pleased so long to afford us.

I cannot call this a particular *sin*, It is, if you will, an *Aggravation* of all the rest, or *all* of them summed up together. However I give it a particular consideration, because it is a thing that God has set a Mark upon, and has so far declared his displeasure against it, that he has determined it a just cause to *Un-people* or *Un-Church* a Nation.

Our Saviour tells us that when a certain man had Planted a Fig-Tree in his Vineyard and came and sought Fruit thereon, and found none he said unto the Dresser *of his Vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this Fig-Tree and find none, cut it down, why doth it cumber the ground?* Luke xiii. 6.

Let us apply this Parable to ourselves, as certainly the Reason of it will sufficiently prompt us.

us. Was ever *Fig-Tree* or *Vineyard* more curiously Planted, more carefully Dreſt, more richly Manured, more ſecurely Fenced, from the outrages of Beaſts of Prey than our *Fig-Tree*, our *Vineyard*, the *Church* of *England*? For of a Church this Parable is neceſſarily to be underſtood.

Is there any one of the *Proteſtant Churches* in *Europe* that has been ſo regularly Reformed; that in the firſt Conſtitution of it was Eſtabliſhed upon Principles ſo juſtifiable, ſo agreeable with the Laws of *Nature* and *Chriſtianity* and the Civil Rights of the *Kingdom*, as this Church of *England* was?

Is there any *Proteſtant Church* in *Europe* whoſe Articles of *Faith*; whoſe *Diſcipline*; whoſe Manner and Rites of *Worſhip* are more correſpondent to Antient *Tradition* and Catholick *Doctrine* and *Practice*?

Is there any *Proteſtant Church* in *Europe* wherein the Word of God has been taught more ſincerely and more to the edification of the people than among us?

Is there any *Proteſtant Church* that has more comfortably lived under their own *Vines* and their own *Fig-Trees*, has more freely enjoyed all the benefits and privileges that either *Religion* or their *Birthright* could Intitle them to, than we have done?

Is

Is there any *Protestant Church* that has been preserved so miraculously, that hath received so many wonderful deliverances from Enemies of all sorts; Enemies of the *Hills* and of the *Vallies*; and yet notwithstanding all; notwithstanding the contrivances of *false Brethren* within ourselves, and the assaults of the *Publick Adversaries* abroad, does still not only continue in Being, but Flourisheth also, as God be thanked we do at this Day?

The care that God hath taken of this Nation hath been wonderful; his Providences towards us are to be admired for the Rareness and the Graciousness of them. And therefore justly may the Lord of the Vineyard after all this Care, all these Providences, expect some good Fruit from us proportionable to his Kindness to us. And long has he waited for it.

But what Fruits have we produced after all these great opportunities and this great patience? Can we really say, that we now are *Better* than our *Fore-Fathers* of the Reformation, who perhaps had not more light, certainly had not that experience of Gods Mercies and Deliverances that we have? I am affraid our Hearts will give it Against us.

Can we say that we are not worse than they? That we have at least made as good an use and improvement of the Talents that have been committed to us as they did? It is to be

be feared we ſhall be caſt upon this Point alſo.

Our own experience will tell us, if we have lived any conſiderable time in the world, That even ſince our remembrance, Though God hath more and more both heaped his *Favours* and his *Severities* upon us, yet we have grown worſe and worſe.

His Mercies have not Melted us; His Judgments have not Reclaimed us; He hath done all that is Poſſible both by *Gentle* and *Severe* Methods to bring us to a ſenſe of our Duty, but We like the *Deaf Adder have ſtopped our Ears; and have not hearkned to the voice of the Charmer, though he charmed never ſo wiſely.*

What therefore, theſe things conſidered, can we expect, but that God ſhould paſs the ſame Sentence upon this Unthankful, this Irreclaimable People of *England*, that the Lord of the *Vineyard* paſſed upon the *Fig-Tree* in the Parable: *Cut it down, why doth it cumber the ground?*

Or, If you will take it in the words of the Prophet, what ſhould hinder or what can we expect, but that God ſhould ſpeak to us (that is, decree upon us) what he did to his beloved people in the fifth of *Iſaiahs* Prophecy, *O Inhabitants of* Jeruſalem *and men of* Judah, *judg I pray you between me and my Vineyard. What could I have done more to my Vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore then when I looked that it ſhould bring forth*

Grapes,

Grapes, brought it forth Wild Grapes? And now go to, I will tell you what I will do with my Vineyard, I will take away the hedg thereof and it ſhall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof and it ſhall be troden down, and I will lay it waſt, it ſhall not be pruned or digged, but there ſhall come up briers and thorns.

This is the *Judgment* that is here threatened in the Text, which I now come in the *Second* place more particularly to conſider.

A grievous Judgment without doubt it is, and the greateſt that can fall upon any Nation; For ſo much as our *Souls* are of greater concernment to us than our *Bodies*: So much are *Spiritual* Mercies to be preferred before *Temporal*: And ſo much the greater miſery is it for any people to be deprived of them than of the other.

For that Nation that was once Gods own peculiar people to be abandoned by him, and to be layed in common with the reſt of the world that are under the *Prince of the power of the Air*; For that Nation that once enjoyed the influences of Gods preſence, and the Light of the Truth, and the benefits of his Ordinances, now to be ſtript of all theſe; To be without God, without Light, without the Ordinary means of ſaving their Souls; O what more deplorable condition can be imagined!

And yet thus ſevere hath God been with many Nations, thus when their ſins have cryed loud, and the ſinners have been impudent, and all Methods of amendment have been ineffectual, God hath in anger *Removed their Candleſtick* from among them.

The Church of *Epheſus* which Chriſt thus threatens in the Text, Nay all the other ſix Churches of *Aſia* to which the Epiſtles are ſent, are ſad inſtances of this. Once moſt flouriſhing Churches they were, even the very Paradiſe of the Lord, but now they lie waſt and deſolate, over run with Ignorance and Barbarity and *Mahometaniſm.*

That *Africa* which is not now more fruitful of Monſters, than it was once of excellently Wiſe and Learned men; That *Africa* which formerly afforded us our *Clemens*, onr *Origen*, our *Tertullian*, our *Cyprian*, our *Auguſtine*, and many other extraordinary Lights in the Church of God; That Famous *Africa* in whoſe ſoyl Chriſtianity did thrive ſo prodigiouſly, and could boaſt of ſo many Flouriſhing Churches, Alas, is now a Wilderneſs. *The wild Boars have broken into the Vineyard and eaten it up, and it brings forth nothing but briers and thorns*: To uſe the words of the Prophet.

And who knows but God may ſuddainly make this Church and Nation, This our *England*, which *Jeſhurun*-like is *waxed fat and grown proud, and has kicked againſt God*, ſuch another ex-

example of the Vengeance of this Kind.

It is true, in all appearance there is no danger of having our *Candleſtick* removed from us in the ſame ſenſe or manner that thoſe Churches I have inſtanced in, had theirs. We have no apprehenſions that either *Mahometaniſm* or *Paganiſm* will come into theſe Kingdoms: At leaſt not in our days.

It is another kind of removal of our *Candleſtick* that we have reaſon to fear; It is another Religion nigher at hand that is moſt likely to diſplace our *Candleſtick*.

You all know what Religion I mean, It is *Popery* that moſt threatens us. It is that reſtleſs buſie Religion that has made ſo much diſturbance in Chriſtendom; that has always been and is ſtill ſo active by all means juſt or unjuſt, by fraud or force to inſinuate it ſelf into all places. It is this we ought to have the moſt apprehenſions of.

It is true thoſe that are of this Religion do profeſs the Name of Chriſt, and we do not deny them the Title of a Chriſtian Church; But of all ſorts of Chriſtianity this ſeems to be the worſt, and next to the being of no Church, it is the leaſt deſireable to be of This.

And for all the ſpecious Titles of *Viſible* and *Perpetual* and *Catholick* and *Infallible*, which they would amuſe us with; If we did ſeriouſly conſider what a kind of *Religion* we now enjoy, and what a kind of *Religion* will come in the place of

it, if ever they get their will of us, we ſhould ſadly reflect upon the Change. And for all we continued a Chriſtian Country, Yet we ſhould lament over ourſelves that our *Candleſtick was removed out of its place.*

I believe there are few here but ſufficiently underſtand what a kind of Religion this is, and what you are to expect from it: But yet I will beg leave to give a brief account of ſome of the Articles of it. Not to inſtruct you, but to give you occaſion to conſider how well it will ſute with us of this Kingdom, or indeed with Any that would be Chriſtians after the way of Chriſts Inſtitution.

It is a Religion, whoſe avowed Principles are to keep their people in ignorance as much as they can. For with them *Ignorance is the Mother of Devotion.* And if you do but blindly *Believe* as the Church *Believes*, and blindly *Obey* what is impoſed upon you, you are good *Catholicks.*

It is a Religion, in which you will not be allowed to have any *Prayers* in *public* that you can underſtand. When you come to Church, you may entertain yourſelves with ſaying over your *Roſary* (which is a ſolemn ſet of Praiers containing *Ten* addreſſes to the *Virgin Mary* for *One* to our *Lord*) and other *Private* Prayers, if you have them: But joyn in the *Publick* Service with the Miniſter

Minister you cannot, unless you understand *Latin*.

It is a Religion, into which as soon as you enter you must give up your Bibles. For the people must not read the Scripture without especial Licence, and not at all of that Translation you now have of it.

It is a Religion that Robs you of half the Sacrament: For you must never be allowed to receive the Cup in the Lords Supper; Notwithstanding the Institution of our Lord in expres words: And notwithstanding the Practice of the Primitive Church to the contrary.

It is a Religion, in which you are so far from being permitted *to try all things and to hold to that which is good*, according to the Apostles Command; That you must wholly submit your reason and understanding to the Dictates of an Infallible Judg, even so far, (if one of their greatest Authors say true) to be bound to believe *Virtue* to be *Bad*, and *Vice* to be *Good*, if it shall please his *Holiness* to say so

Bellar. de Rom. Pontif. lib. 4. cap. 5.

Nay, It is a Religion in which you shall not be allowed to believe your very *Senses*. For though four of your five Senses tell you that one of the Consecrated Elements in the Sacrament is a piece of Bread, yet you are obliged under pain of Damnation to believe that it is not so; But the very Body of Christ that was Crucified at *Jerusalem*, and is now in Heaven; and which upon this suppo-

ſuppoſition muſt be Actually and Separately preſent in a thouſand diſtant places at once every day.

It is a Religion that will bring you back to the Old *Paganiſh Idolatry*: Or to that which is as near it as can be. For as the Old Heathens had their inferior *Deities*, their *Dæmons* and *Hero's* to be Mediators between God and them: So will you have your ſeveral Saints and Patrons of the like nature, which you muſt apply to for the recommending your Prayers to the Divine Majeſty. And as they had the *Images* of their Gods and Mediators to worſhip and fall down before; So will you alſo for the ſame purpoſe have the *Images* of the bleſſed *Trinity*, and the Virgin *Mary* and the reſt of the Saints.

It is true, the Pagans were mightily reproved for theſe things, both in the Scripture and by the Primitive Chriſtians. And they made ſeveral Defences and Apologies for their Practices. And the very ſame doth the Church of *Rome* now make for her Invocation of Saints and Image-Worſhip. But if the one were guilty of Idolatry there is little doubt but the other are ſo alſo: For there is not an hairs breadth difference between the Pleas and Apologies that each party makes for it ſelf.

Nay, It is a Religion that will engage you in a more Unnatural Idolatry than ever the Pagans were guilty of. *Cicero* that was a Heathen himſelf,

De Nat. Deor. lib. 3.

ſelf, and knew as much of that Religion as any man living did; Yet affirms that there was none ſo mad in any of the Religions of his time as to pretend to eat his God. But yet this you muſt do in that Religion every time you Receive the Sacrament. And the Prieſt does it every day when he ſays Maſs. For he eats that which himſelf and you all muſt worſhip. And you are taught to believe that what you worſhip in the Maſs is God, that is, the very *Humanity* of our Saviour united perſonally to his *Divinity*.

It is true, In this Religion there are many advantages and conveniences pretended, that you cannot really have in the Religion you now profeſs. But look you to them, whether they will prove ſo in the event.

The eaſie ways they have to reconcile ſinners to God, even after the moſt Vicious life, by the means of the Sacrament of *Penance*, as it is commonly Taught and Adminiſtred in that Church: Together with the liberty you may take in the choice of ſuch a Confeſſor as you think will be moſt favourable to your Caſe. Add to this, The Virtue of *Indulgences*, and *Maſſes* for the Dead. As alſo the efficacy of *Pilgrimages*, *Reliques* and *Holy Garments*, &c. For the purging of *Sins*.

All theſe things put together may perhaps rid you of a great many Uneaſineſſes and Scruples and Pangs of Conſcience, with which you might other-

otherwiſe be troubled; and which would not be ſo eaſily Cured in the Way that you are now in. There is little doubt but upon the Commonly received Principles of that Religion, you may go to Heaven upon much eaſier Terms than you can upon ours: But yet for all that, in a buſineſs of ſuch conſequence as the Salvation of a mans Soul is, It is good to make a ſerious enquiry whether of the two Ways is the ſafer.

But there is one thing in this Religion which will not ſo eaſily go down with *Engliſhmen*: And that is, That you cannot therein be any longer good Subjects to your Prince, than his Holineſs will give you leave.

If his Majeſty ſhould be a *Heretic* (as it is certain his preſent Majeſty is in their account) Nay, In other Caſes beſides that of *Hereſie*; the Pope has power to Depoſe him, and Abſolve his Subjects from their Allegiance. And that not only in the judgment of their moſt famous *Caſuiſts*, and by the Eſtabliſhed Rules of their *Canon Law*, but by the Decree of an Infallible *General Council*. And it has been a frequent Practice of the Pope to make uſe of his Power in this way.

Nay, in this Kingdom of *England* he needs not ſtay for ſuch pretences. For his Holineſs (as appears upon Record) has declared, that this Kingdom is held in Fee of the Papacy. And that whoever wears the Crown here is their *Vaſſal*, and

and consequently may be turned out at pleasure.

What the effects of these Doctrines have been, we of this Kingdom have had sufficient experience since the Reformation; Not to mention the troubles they have given us in former times. The instances are so many and so very well known, that I need not name them. But if they were all forgot, The *Late* shall I say or the *Present Popish Plot* for the taking away the life of His Sacred Majesty, and Subverting the Protestant Religion and the Established Government of this Kingdom, now brought to light; This alone, though all the other instances were worn out of memory, would sufficiently shew us what we are to expect from these *Roman Principles*, as to the security either of our *Prince*, or our *Liberties*, or our *Religion*.

But blessed be Gods Name, that this Cursed Design has been hitherto Defeated, and we are here to Praise him for it, and to Pray to him for a farther Discovery of it.

And blessed be his Name, That he hath given us this Remarkable evidence that he has not yet abandoned us, notwithstanding our manifold provocations. Certainly this extraordinary Providence of God towards us, is one of the most Comfortable Arguments that we can draw to ourselves, That God has yet some Pitty for this Nation: If we will but pitty ourselves.

And Lastly, blessed be Gods Name that this Mercy has already had this good effect upon us, That we are awakened into a more lively sense of the manifold Iniquity and Mischief and Danger of the Popish Religion and Party.

What is now further to be desired, but that the Issue of things among us may be suitable to these beginnings?

God has once more given this Nation a great Opportunity for the Establishing her Tottering *Candlestick*, and who knows whether ever the like will be offered again?

It therefore infinitely concerns all of us, especially You to whom the Managery of Publick Affairs is committed, to improve this Present Opportunity to the good purposes for which it was given; That so this great Mercy and Providence of God be not lost upon us.

Offences may come. And we may be disappointed. But as our Saviour said, *Wo be to that Man by whom the Offence cometh.* Such a man will never be able to answer it either to God, or his Country, or at last to his own Conscience.

O may God so inspire you with the Spirit of Wisdom and Counsel; with Temper and Moderation; with a Spirit so disengaged from private Ends, and Interests; So unbyassed by particular Faction; And so wholly intent upon the Public Good, that you may be the blessed Instruments

ments of Healing all the Distempers we groan under; And of Deriving upon us those Blessings which we this Day Pray for.

That by your means *Atheism* and *Contempt* of *Religion*, as also *Lewdness* and *Debauchery* of all kinds may be so discouraged that they shall not dare to appear with an open Face.

That by your means a stop may be put to the Scandalous *Schisms* and *Divisions* that are among us; That if it be possible we may serve God with one Heart and with one Mind.

That by your means, not only the Person of His Sacred Majesty, and the Rights of his Crown may be secured against all wicked attempts, whether of Papists or Others: But also that upon his Head the Crown may be so Supported, and so Flourish, that we may at least be in a condition not to fear the Malice or the Power of any Foreign Enemy.

Lastly, that by your means as effectual Provision as possible may be made: both for the keeping out that *Foreign Religion*, which, as we have seen, so little serves the ends of Christianity, and so much disserves the Interest both of King and People: And for the more firm Establishment of the *Protestant Religion* of the Church of *England*: That so our present *Candlestick* may be continued to our Posterity, and they as well as we may have reason to bless God for You.

But in Order to the procuring those great blessings to the Kingdom: There is a duty necessary to be performed by all of us in our *private* Capacities, which is here specified in the Text, *viz. Repentance. I will come unto thee quickly* (says our Saviour) *and will remove thy Candlestick out of its place, except thou Repent.* Which *Repentance*, How it ought to be performed by us, Is the *Third* and Last thing I am to speak to.

But because I would not exceed the ordinary limits of a Sermon, I shall only mention the Heads of those things which upon this Occasion are proper to be insisted on.

If we would *Repent* sincerely of our sins, so as to do our parts towards the prevention of those *Judgments* that hang over our heads, and the procuring those *Blessings* we stand in need of: It will be necessary that every one of us do deeply Humble and Afflict our Souls before God for our *own Sins*, the sins which we have in person committed; Devoutly confessing them, and begging of God, That when he makes inquisition for a *National* guilt, he would not remember them, nor let the publick suffer any thing upon our account.

It is also necessary that we be duly sensible of the *Common Sins* of others so as to *Repent* of them also, Lamenting before God the Corruptions of the Times: The Publick Fashionable Vices of the Age. This was the Spirit of *David* who was con-

concern'd for the faults of others as well as his own; *Rivers of Tears* (saith he) *run down my Eyes because men keep not thy Law.*

Nay, further, In order to a *National Repentance*, We are obliged to confess to God the *Sins* of our *Forefathers*, and pray for the forgiveness of them also. What my own former *private* sins are to me at present with respect to my *personal* Capacity; the same are the sins of our *Fathers* to us all, considered as a Nation or People. We are to Repent as well of the past as of the present sins of the Land. This is the Rule that God himself hath prescribed for a *Publick Repentance*. And for not putting that Rule in Practice, the people of the *Jews* in our Saviours time severely suffered. For upon the *Men of that Generation* (as our Saviour had threatened) *was Revenged all the Righteous blood shed in the Land from the blood of* Abel *to the blood of* Zachariah. Though yet none of that blood was shed by that Generation. Great reason therefore have we at this day seriously to put up to God that Petition which we so often repeat in our *Litany*, *Remember not Lord our Offences, nor the Offences of our Forefathers; but spare us good Lord, spare thy people whom thou hast Redeemed with thy most precious blood and be not angry with us for ever.* Matth. xxiii. 35.

But to make this *Repentance* such as it ought to be, there is further required a through *Change* in our *Hearts* and *Minds*; So that as we Confess and ask Pardon for the Faults of our Lives, we should

also

also amend them. Without this all our Ceremonious Humiliation will signifie nothing.

Nay, We must not only Reform *Ourselves*, but do what we can in our Spheres towards the Reforming of *Others*. And every one of us might do a great deal, if we would; though it was but in this one thing, In heartily discouraging *Scandalous* and *Open* sins where ever we meet with them; So far as it may be done without breach of Respect to our Superiors or Forfeiture of common Prudence. If Vice had once an ill name in the world; Was once generally stigmatized with Reproach and Ignominy, it would quickly lose its Empire, and thousands that are now the slaves of it would become Proselytes to Virtue.

But further if we truely fear the *Judgment* I have been speaking of, and by our *Repentance* would prevent it, Let us make this particular expression of that *Repentance*, *viz.* Let us set a great Value upon the *Religion* we at present enjoy. Let us in all our Actions shew a great Zeal and Concernment for it, and do what we can both towards the continuing and promoting it.

If Every one of us in his way would but express half that Zeal and Industry and Diligence in the Cause of our Religion that we see our Adversaries do; We should probably in a very little time see a quite different Face of Things: And should not only put a stop to their present Successes, but gain so much ground upon them as to cast

them

them into deſpair of ever making a Conqueſt of this Nation. But here is the miſery, we are ſo Confident and Secure of the goodneſs of our Cauſe, that we think it will ſupport itſelf without any help of ours. Let us in this Point learn Wiſdom from our Enemies.

But eſpecially let us practiſe heartily thoſe Virtues which our Religion peculiarly Teaches as Oppoſed to Popery. Let us be Meek, and Gentle, and Long-Suffering, even to thoſe that differ in Opinion from us. Let us hate all Tricks and Devices and Equivocations, both in our Words and our Carriage. Let us be Conſtantly and Inflexibly Loyal to our Prince, and let no conſideration in the world make us violate our Allegiance to him.

To all which, Let us in the laſt place add our earneſt and conſtant Prayers to God, That he would be pleaſed to take pity of us. To avert the *Judgments* we are threatened with, and continue the *Mercies* we have hitherto enjoyed. That he would protect our *Religion* and make it to flouriſh more and more. That he would preſerve our *King*, our *Government*, our *Laws*. And in order thereunto, That he would Influence and Direct all the Publick Councels, eſpecially the great *Councel* of the Nation now Aſſembled in *Parliament*, That this *Seſſion* of Theirs may have a Happy and a Glorious Iſſue. Which God of his Mercy grant, *&c.*

FINIS.

before the House of Commons.

them into despair of ever making a Conquest of this Nation. But here is the misery, we are so Confident and Secure of the goodness of our Cause, that we think it will support itself without any help of ours. Let us in this Point learn Wisdom from our Enemies.

But especially let us practise heartily those Virtues which our Religion peculiarly Teaches as Opposed to Popery. Let us be Meek, and Gentle, and Long-Suffering, even to those that differ in Opinion from us. Let us hate all Tricks and Devices and Equivocations, both in our Words and our Carriage. Let us be Constantly and Inflexibly Loyal to our Prince, and let no consideration in the world make us violate our Allegiance to him.

To all which, Let us in the last place add our earnest and constant Prayers to God, That he would be pleased to take pity of us. To avert the *Judgments* we are threatened with, and continue the *Mercies* we have hitherto enjoyed. That he would protect our *Religion* and make it to flourish more and more. That he would preserve our *King*, our *Government*, our *Laws*. And in order thereunto, That he would Influence and Direct all the Publick Councels, especially the great *Council* of the Nation now Assembled in *Parliament*, That this *Session* of Theirs may have a Happy and a Glorious Issue. Which God of his Mercy grant, &c.

FINIS.